



News Release

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Shellfish harvest in Samish Bay limited due to periodic pollution

High bacteria levels pose health risk from eating shellfish

OLYMPIA — High levels of bacteria periodically found in the Samish Bay has led the state Department of Health to place restrictions on the harvest of shellfish from much of the area. Five-day closures will happen whenever extremely high levels of potentially dangerous fecal coliform bacteria enter the bay from the Samish River.

“When Samish Bay has high bacteria levels the shellfish do, too,” said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. “We know this is a hardship for shellfish operations here, but we must make sure that contaminated shellfish don’t reach consumers. Based on our state’s previous successes in restoring polluted waters, we hope for quick progress with the plans to clean up the Samish Bay watershed.”

Samish Bay usually has good water quality, but tests show that when there is a lot of rural runoff into the river, [it contaminates the bay](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/Pubs/samish-qa.pdf) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/Pubs/samish-qa.pdf>). As a result, the department has changed the classification of most of the bay from “Approved” to “Conditionally Approved.” In 2010, based on the same conditions, the area was closed 14 times for a total of 63 days.

US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidelines require that states monitor fecal coliform bacteria and take protective actions when the levels may threaten the public’s health. If FDA guidelines are not followed, shellfish from Washington would not be allowed to be shipped to other states.

Skagit County has received funding from the US Environmental Protection Agency and has started the process of identifying and correcting pollution sources. The state Departments of Agriculture and Ecology along with the Washington Conservation Commission are working with Skagit County on strategies to improve the conditions in the shellfish growing area.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health website at <http://www.doh.wa.gov> for a healthy dose of information.